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ABSTRACT

Sources of faculty discontent with university administration are discussed as background for a brief report of a case study. Evidence is raised against the usual arguments of university observers. A sample of faculty members at one institution were surveyed and appeared divided approximately in half regarding contentment and discontentment. Group norms concerning adequate due process were more prevalent than desires expressed for participation and unionization, even among discontented faculty members. Factors contributing to contentment or discontentment include employee status and types of academic field and function, but more important is the university's unequal administrative concern among academic areas. Comments are made concerning the consequences of this situation, especially to universities of the type under examination.
(Author/MSE)

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Mixed Emotions About University Governance: The Faculty at "X Tech"

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Abstract

Sources of faculty discontentment with university administration are discussed as background for a brief report of a case study. Evidence is raised against the usual emphases of university watchers. A sample of faculty divided approximately into halves regarding contentment/discontentment, and norms concerning adequate "due process" were more prevalent than desires expressed for participation and unionization, even among the disgruntled faculty. Factors contributing to contentment/discontentment include employee status and types of academic field and function, but more important is the university's unequal emphasis among academic areas. Comments are made concerning consequences especially to universities of the type under examination.

MIXED EMOTIONS ABOUT UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE: THE FACULTY AT "X TECH"

Governance and the Faculty: Some Generalities

Prominently visible in writings about universities is concern about the strain accompanying administrative efforts to exert an influence vis-a-vis the organizational members. Hierarchical involvement may be viewed as a product of two main forces. First, administrative functions tend to increase in response to demands from external sources. Second, administrative involvement occurs as a means of coping with the implications of university complexity. The often noted result of administrators' efforts is tension between elements of the institution.[1]

Pressures generated by external sources have effects on the operating style of the university. Institutional autonomy and professional integrity, and accustomed structures and processes based upon these norms, often seem threatened by the ramifications of external demands. Attempts to advance toward managerial involvement, and the concomitant organizational tensions, are especially noticeable among the fast growing universities which feel strong environmental pushes from governmental and private influences in regard to education, research, service, and the funding of each. There are many such "problem universities," and collectively they constitute a significant single type.

Although the imperative to control often traces ultimately to the impact of externally-imposed demands, more strictly internal problems also stimulate control attempts. Complexities inherent in size and functional proliferation require institutional efforts to ensure the efficient pursuit of goals. Allocations of property and money must be made appropriately to keep apace of ever-changing conditions. Auxiliary services such as libraries have to be maintained and improved. Legal matters such as degree requirements and contractual relations with faculty members, and provisions for student life must be arranged. Moreover, the administrator

faces the presence of indigenous tensions regarding individualistic persons' and departments' rivalries over scholastic ideologies and professional ambitions.

Administrative activity is not simply a result of administrators' inclination to seek and therefore to find areas where their touch is called for. The administrator is expected, indeed he is often asked by other organization members to become involved in housekeeping and conflict-resolution problems. In either case -- in administrators' searches for new functions or in their performance of expected roles -- others in the university find ample reasons to object.

Administrative actions threaten old patterns, as when building assignments mix professors of different academic disciplines. The quality of administrative work in continuing affairs is often a bone of contention, for example in the operation of the library. Equity is a frequent issue, as in cases where facilities seem better for a technological department than for a humanities department. Officials' concerns with curriculum and performance standards may be seen as interloping. Issues can arise over side effects of administrators' handling of even the most mundane of problems. In short, much of what management does can often impinge upon the performance of faculty members' functions.

These and other types of tension seem to be constantly present, although they are erratically patterned and dependent upon particular events and styles of management. A more pervasive concern is that administrative activity threatens the power structure which many nonadministrators prefer. Often considered more desirable than managerial involvement is the loose, unstructured process in which collegial agreement is the only and not very strong force over university personnel.

Considering the frequency with which administrative actions have consequences which are regarded by many other actors to be objectionable, it is no wonder that the degree of managerial presence is often at issue. Still, there are unresolved questions about the relationship of faculty and university officialdom. It will be noticed that in the preceding paragraphs the wording is equivocal concerning whether the managerial stratum is indeed salient and whether it is successful in directing the university toward adaptation to external demands. By no means does the bulk of the

literature conclude that university managers have achieved such capabilities; on the contrary, often underscored are obstacles against their functioning as administrators in the usual sense of the term.[2]

Compounding the complexity of the matter are university traditions which only in part have continued into the present, participants' preferences regarding structure which are not uniformly agreed upon within and between organizational strata, and diverse assessments of Is and Ought. Traditionally preferred by many faculty members (and still preferred to a large extent, often to the point of being an ideological mainstay) is a structure which allows an egocentrism checked only by consensus. "Collegiality" is the source and style of making what few policies need to be made. "Autonomy" characterizes the remainder of university life.

The university, however, became too complex for this traditional concept to remain viable as the sole operating principle. Collegiality came to be viewed as inadequate as the only process for all phases of the university. A need for the management function was evident. So, there evolved an amendment to the norm of collegiality. Reluctant to give up any of the traditional values but rather forced by circumstances to compromise, the typical university member began to emphasize participation in governance or some variation on direct participation which would retain academicians' influence. If governance had to rear its ugly head, the government would be controlled by the will of its subjects.

Even so, a contrary set of traditions started to develop, one which strongly supported the idea of the managerial function. The two fundamental traditions co-exist with difficulty. Preferences for consensual or democratic "anarchy" collide with the practices of university government in which the faculty is given only some degree of delegated responsibility which is often a chance merely to review and advise.[3]

Importantly involved in this hybrid of university organizational life are faculty members' mixed feelings regarding authority and related aspects of the organization. A university has some sort of blend of hierarchical-bureaucratic and collegial-democratic elements, and some variation of overall administrative style. But just what blend/style encounters what degree of contentment/discontentment is not clear. More has to be understood about faculty orientations before an accurate appraisal can be made

of the authority role of university administration, for either descriptive or prescriptive purposes.

Findings at X Tech

The author conducted a study of faculty orientations toward the organization at a single university in the Southwest.[4] Here called "X Tech," it can be listed among the "problem" institutions referred to earlier. X Tech feels external pressures owing to its legal status as a land-grant institution somewhat supervised by a State agency and subject to legislative measures. It has experienced internal problems tracing to recent growth spurts and current size (more than 15,000 students, one-fourth of them post-graduates in applied fields), and its academic and services programs' diversity.

Questionnaires, interviews, and documentary data suggest that a two-toned complexion characterizes X Tech. A representative sample of the faculty split approximately in half regarding discontentment and contentment with the organization's style. That many evinced contentment provides grist for an argument that X Tech, at least, does not quite fit the simpler image of internal university strife. Those faculty labeled "discontented" tend to agree, and the "contended" to disagree with these depictions of X Tech:

1. Administrators act arbitrarily
2. The organization is "bureaucratic" in pejorative senses such as centralization and rigidity, with little departmental autonomy
3. The faculty has little influence
4. Value conflicts occur between university and professor
5. Tensions exist, both inter- and intra-stratum.

To the student of organization theory, "arbitrariness" and "bureaucraticness" may not seem to be compatible images, since the latter but not the former implies rigid adherence to the structure of rules and roles. The two items were related in the minds of the respondents, however. It is especially noteworthy that tensions were reported in two directions: vertically between faculty and administration, and horizontally within the faculty stratum. For the discontented member, it was not a simple case of "us versus them."

Possible Consequences

The data allow comments on consequences concerning the split in discontentment/contentment. X Tech's disgruntled faculty evinced an inclination to favor checking arbitrary power with faculty power. Interestingly, however, half of this group indicated a desire not so much for a strong general-faculty role in actual decision-making as for "due process" and a better policy-challenging or -amending role for individuals and small groups. The concept of due process does include participation or at least an equitable representation in the formulation of policy. But often of more importance are two other elements: equality of treatment in the application of policy, and the desirability of the substantive content of policy. Due process does not typically become an issue unless violations of these latter elements occur. Violations did occur in the opinion of the discontented, and they wanted more opportunity to react and feed back to existing policies as individuals and as members of small groups.

Contented faculty were not so sensitive to the concerns of due process, and opted against an emphasis on faculty participation in policy making. Many even expressed dissatisfaction with the overabundance of meetings in the existing committee system. Not only were faculty involvements in administrators' bailiwicks of decision-making perceived as illegitimate by this group; the meetings themselves were described as inefficient. No few deprecating remarks were made about the debilitating effects of following parliamentary procedures in general-faculty meetings and committees, discussants' wandering into byways, and other "wastes of time." X Tech is apparently not a sort of setting where faculty participation in actual decision-making is strongly idealized by either group, the discontented or contented faculty.

As if they had given up hope for any effective participative and due process facilities, the disenchanted faculty tended to endorse extra-channel power tactics. These tactics included "leaking" complaints to external ears including the press, circulating petitions and joining in demonstrations internally, and soliciting help in power struggles from the AAUP. An item of interest is that there was very little inclination, even among the highly discontented at X Tech, to endorse professors' unionization as an extra-channel measure.

It is possible that unhappy contingents of a faculty would want, and perhaps be satisfied with, adequate due process. Failing satisfaction, they might escalate into a militancy which would press administration through participative assemblies (which in themselves are frustrating experiences in the view of many, a factor which ironically might compound the climate of discontentment). Or they might utilize the ultimate extra-channel weapons extensively, and perhaps destructively.

Another consequence of faculty views suggested in the data would underscore an alarming although elusive eventuality. The discontented members tended to link the charge of administrative arbitrariness to their seeing colleagues and other departments being given preferential treatment. They accordingly tended to endorse the idea of adding to the structure of rules and decision channels provisees which would check inequalities. Many of the contented members, cognizant of their receiving special benefits, rather vehemently opposed such measures. A bitter feud could easily erupt, with the result of either or both firming up the existing balance of power, and building further rigidification into the university. Michel Crozier has described such an arbitrary favoritism syndrome in which an organization suffers a continuing power struggle by which it eventually hamstrings itself.[5]

Explanations for the Diverging Appraisals

Since a number of consequences (of which these are only examples) derive from discontentment, we should examine further the contributing conditions behind that attitude. In X Tech, a surprising discovery was that the more "locally" oriented faculty -- those who were participants in and spectators of social, athletic and cultural university events -- tended to be discontented. "Aloof" members, a type which theoretical literature associates with externally oriented "professionalism,"[6] tended contrary to theory to applaud current administrative styles. They were not merely alienated from X Tech as if it were irrelevant to their lives, they tended to be supportive.

An explanation for this emerges from the data, however. At X Tech the more "aloof" and externally oriented faculty who endorsed the organizational style were usually also members of applied science and extension service departments. These two fields were reported to dominate X Tech as a university of the land-grant tradition; hence these faculty members were prime

beneficiaries of X Tech's program emphases. Although the X Tech respondents in humanities, social sciences and pure (theoretical) sciences departments tended to be discontented, it is not suggested that these are the "enemies of administrators" in every university. The "causal" factor seems to be program imbalance more than type of academic field.

It was also found that members who felt their primary roles to be in undergraduate teaching and individual publication were disgruntled. Most of these personnel at X Tech were in non-applied fields, however. That contented professors held roles in graduate education, institution-based research, and extension services only reflects their being mostly in applied sciences and services departments. Again, it appears that program imbalance, rather than "faculty type" per se, was the most salient source of faculty discontentment and contentment.

Program imbalance of the X Tech type is perhaps characteristic of large state universities of the land-grant tradition generally. However, while faculty discontentment may be traced in large measure to this imbalance, it is noteworthy that a substantial proportion of faculty at X Tech did not evince a sense of dismay with organizational style. A guess might be hazarded by extending this case to other institutions: the X Tech type may be a relatively calm setting, in that only some faculty were prone to militancy. Even if program imbalance and related inequities and frustrations are insurmountable, administrators of this university type might possibly survive the increasing decibel level of faculty voices which is found in universities across the nation. On the other hand, advice toward more complete stability and faculty/university harmony might be offered: Correct imbalances and extend the full range of due process protections for all components of the university. In light of the militancy potential of half of the X Tech respondents, university administrators would do well to heed this counsel.

Footnotes

1. The following patterns are elaborated in John Brubacher and Willis Rudy, HIGHER EDUCATION IN TRANSITION: AN AMERICAN HISTORY, 1636-1956 (New York: Harper and Row, 1958); and in Clark Kerr, THE USES OF THE UNIVERSITY (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

2. See Theodore Caplow and Reese McGee, THE ACADEMIC MARKETPLACE (New York: Basic Books, 1958); Neal Gross, "Organizational Lag in American Universities," HARVARD EDUCATIONAL REVIEW 33 (1963), 58-73; and W. Allen Wallis, "Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces in University Organization," DAEDALUS 93, No. 4 (Fall, 1964), 1070-83.

3. Faculty values regarding governance are treated by Howard Bowen, "Governance and Education Reform," in G. Kerry Smith (ed.), AGONY AND COMPROMISE (Washington, D. C.: American Association for Higher Education, Current Issues in Higher Education, 1969). This sequence of events is traceable also in several historical treatments. See Richard Hofstadter and Walter Metzger, THE DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN THE UNITED STATES (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955); and L. Veysey, THE EMERGENCE OF THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966). See also Jacques Barzun's essay, THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY (New York: Harper and Row, 1968).

4. Information concerning the study's full report may be obtained by contacting the author.

5. Michel Crozier, THE BUREAUCRATIC PHENOMENON (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

6. Alvin W. Gouldner, "Cosmopolitans and Locals: Toward an Analysis of Latent Social Roles, Part II," ADMINISTRATIVE SCIENCE QUARTERLY 2, No. 4 (March, 1958), 444-80.